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GUNNAR BEREFELT

## *On Symbol and Allegory*

"Curiouser and curiouser!" cried Alice.  
Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

### I

THE DISTINCTION between the concepts *symbol* and *allegory* offers a problem which is central in Romantic aesthetics.<sup>1</sup> This distinction formed a watershed in art historical thought of the period: while the preceding tradition was felt to be characterized by an allegorical mode of expression, the new art (which it was hoped would take root at this very time) should be a symbolic representation. Consequently the problem was very important since its solution presupposed that development which the Romanticists hoped to bring about.<sup>2</sup> Whether they succeeded in this is difficult to determine, for their reasoning is clothed in an abstruse, metaphysical vocabulary which must be deciphered. In any case they approached the problem from the wrong direction. The questions, What is a symbol? What is an allegory? and What is the difference between them? were for the Romantic aestheticians not essentially a problem about words and the application of words, but a metaphysical problem about transcendental entities. The preoccupation of Romanticism with the symbol-problem is very interesting from a historical point of view. For in spite of its

abstruse proposals for solving the problem, it sometimes seems to anticipate essential problems and conceptions within modern art, as well as modern aesthetics and art history (I hope to deal with this in a later study).

Winckelmann, believing that art was decadent and its regeneration necessary,<sup>3</sup> advocated the reconstruction of a comprehensive system of allegories (*Allegorik*), which—along with *Altertum*—should give to art a new spiritual vitality.<sup>4</sup> Let us consider Winckelmann's concept of allegory, which was to play an important role as a starting point for Romantic aesthetics. We easily find a representative definition: The allegory suggests ideas through images and is thus a general language, in the first place, for artists ["eine Andeutung der Begriffe durch Bilder, und also eine allgemeine Sprache, vornehmlich der Künstler."]<sup>5</sup> By images (*Bilder*) he means signs (*Zeichen*) and/or figures (*Figuren*) and every allegoric image should in itself present the distinctive qualities of the designated thing... so that the allegory should be comprehensible in itself without any further explanations. ["soll die unterscheidenden Eigenschaften der bedeutenden Sach in sich enthalten.... Die Allegorie soll folglich durch sich selbst verständlich seyn, und keiner Beyschrift haben."]<sup>6</sup> This means that the allegoric image in some way or other should represent one or more characteristic qualities of what it designates in order to evoke

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by its very existence (in the work of art) the conception of the designatum. According to our mentor, the most perfect allegory is the one which by means of one separate figure (i.e., a human figure), without any additions, refers to one or more ideas.<sup>7</sup> But usually, he says, the allegory must consist of a number of allegoric signs or figures (Winckelmann's allegory-concept is thus extraordinarily extensive).

The following period did not consider the problem as naively as Winckelmann, and, above all, the allegory was no longer discussed, but instead the allegory versus the symbol. This distinction Winckelmann never made.

The first, at least the first significant, attempt to distinguish between the two concepts is suggested in a study which Heinrich Meyer wrote with Goethe, "Über die Gegenstände der bildenden Kunst," which was published in the *Propyläen* in 1798. This question, How does the symbol differ from allegory? was one of the central problems in Goethe's conjecture about art during the 1790's and he returned constantly to this in his correspondence with Schiller and his conversation with Meyer. In the study in the *Propyläen*, allegory is considered a communicative sign; allegory deals only with content (the literary, discursive). Symbols, on the other hand, really *are* what they represent ["sind wirklich, was sie darstellen"]. Symbol deals with form! Meyer's foremost demand on a work of art was that its import should be conveyed by its formal wholeness without any means of assistance, without further elucidation ["ohne äussere Beihilfe, ohne Nebenerklärung"]; he hereby implicitly defines his and Goethe's conception of symbol. The idea of a work of art as a formal *Gesamtsymbol* is suggested in the works of Herder and Moritz, who surely influenced Goethe and Meyer. But the theorists in Weimar were hardly able to develop their ideas, once the problem was posed.<sup>8</sup>

The most systematically elaborated distinctions between symbol and allegory are made by Schelling. The meaning of the symbol is to be found in its form; it concretizes ideas. Allegory, on the other hand,

means a thing other than itself ["etwas anderes als sich selbst"] (*Philosophie der Kunst*); it is merely a sign "pointing" towards the ideas.

Although Winckelmann's allegory-concept by *verba formalia* was wide enough to comprise most of what the Romanticists considered as symbolic images in general, and although they often failed to express themselves clearly in their definitions of these two concepts, the allegory as artistic method of representation came to be regarded as something out of fashion. This is clearly seen in A. W. Schlegel's criticism of the painters of his day for their habitual allegorical allusions.<sup>9</sup> The allegory was quite simply associated with the human figure and a mythologic-historical theme—in short, with the Classicist tradition. Without exception, the allegoric images recommended by Winckelmann were derived from mythology and classical epics well-known to the educated of that time. Traditionally these personages, their actions, and attributes were associated with fairly definite ideas.

This faded Olympus however was not regarded as capable of embodying that deepened spiritual content which the Romanticists wanted in art. They hoped to find this symbol-producing, mythologic content in the Christian religion, in different philosophic systems, e.g., Spinoza's philosophy (Fr. Schlegel<sup>10</sup>), or in transcendental idealism (Schelling), or in nature. The character and function of art as a "language," through which one could communicate otherwise unexpressible truths, was a fundamental idea which united all otherwise more or less disparate conceptions. The power and unlimited possibilities of language (in the widest possible sense of the word) were a highly esteemed fact, fundamental to philosophy, culture-anthropology, theology, and aesthetics of that time. Novalis has in this connection pointed out the calamity and deliverance of Romanticism: "We seek everywhere the Absolute, the Infinite, but find only the Conditioned, the Finite," he says. Our deliverance however is to be found in language, in the word and sign, by which we are able magically to bind the

whole universe. Three letters designate God: How simple becomes thus the handling of the universe, how evident the concentricity of the world of the mind ["Wie leicht wird hier die Handhabung des Universums, wie anschaulich die Konzentrität ist die Dynamik des Geisterreichs"].<sup>11</sup> All the finite world becomes a mere reflection of the metaphysic "Infinite," a symbol of God and the divine connection of life. In Herder, Schiller, Goethe, Schelling, the Schlegel brothers, Novalis, and Wackenroder, we find numerous variations on the metaphor of nature as a "cipher-language" or an "esoteric book."

What we call Nature is a poem concealed in wonderful secret writing ["Was wir Natur nennen, ist ein Gedicht, das in geheimer, wunderbarer Schrift verschlossen liegt"].<sup>12</sup> The content of this poem is thus the "absolute reality" behind the external "illusory" world. This makes up an essential credo for the development of the symbol-conception of Romanticism. As nature is a symbolic manifestation of the cosmogonic connections, so art should be such a symbolic display of a "higher reality."<sup>13</sup> It is obvious that the semantic relation of nature—and of the expected new art—to its designata was regarded as essentially different from the referring of traditional art.<sup>14</sup> The symbol was, according to the Romantic manner of speaking, an image which like a crystal reflection contained the "essence itself" ("das Wesen selbst," i.e., the designatum),<sup>15</sup> whereas the allegory was merely a sign which "pointed to" the designatum. A poetically inclined student of Romanticism has in the 1930's given her own definition of the two concepts, which also shows the Romantic conception of the distinction in a nutshell: The symbol is a metaphysical something in sensuous representation. It is a transcendental idea compressed into the focus of the visible. The contrast between life upon Earth and the Beyond is annulled by the symbol. . . . The allegory consciously interprets the terrestrial image into a metaphysical sign of the Beyond. It sees an abstract meaning in simple reality. It is not emotionally felt, as is the symbol, but thought out, i.e., constructed ["Symbol

ist ein im Sinnlichen dargestelltes Übersinnliches. Es ist die im Brennpunkt des Augenscheinlichen zusammengedrückte Idee eines Geistig-Seelichen. Der Gegensatz von Diesseits und Jenseits wird durch das Symbol aufgehoben. . . . Die Allegorie deutet mit Bewusstsein das irdische Bild in das Unendliche hinein. Sie sieht in der einfachen Wirklichkeit abstrakte Bedeutsamkeit. Sie ist nicht erfährt wie das Symbol, sondern erdacht, z.T. konstruiert"].<sup>16</sup> If one pricks a hole in the linguistic bubbles and tries to concentrate this genuine Romantic conception in an intelligible statement, the essential difference between the symbolic reference and the allegoric seems to be that the former is apprehended in a more emotional way—the designatum is grasped as it were—whereas the latter is more intellectual and discursive.

The most interesting theory is suggested in a highly fragmentary and unsystematic form by the painter Philipp Otto Runge:<sup>17</sup> "Nature is a symbolic manifestation of God and a revelation of the ultimate connections of existence." His proposed program is to find the means of creating in art what he calls "characteristic signs" (i.e., a sort of equivalents) of the elements which reveal the symbolic content of nature.<sup>18</sup> Thereby art should bring about a (symbolic) "total-effect," analogous to that of nature, which gives a cognition of metaphysic "truths."<sup>19</sup>

The very important but implicit problem in Runge's suggested theory is: How do the referential (symbol) constituents in the total-stimulus which produced the revelatory nature-experience correspond to the referential (symbolic) constituents in the work of art? This problem (often implicit) forms the vital point in certain modern theories, especially in Susanne Langer's art-symbol theory, in which an alleged correspondence exists between the "qualities of feeling" of a postulated content of experience and the organization of the referential constituents of the work of art. But the fundamental questions—just what entities (the constituents of the "total-effect" of nature [Runge] or the constituents of the experienced quality of feeling [Langer] and referential constituents of

the work of art) are to be related and in what way is the analogy between the two totalities to be stated?—are passed over in silence.<sup>20</sup>

With that our point of departure is stated. But the following exposition on the concepts *symbol* and *allegory* does of course not aim at being a final interpretation of the symbol-theories of Romanticism—even if it tries to offer a terminology which facilitates the understanding of the principal purposes of Romantic aesthetics—but should be understood as a tentative for a generally applicable distinction between these two concepts and as an introduction to a more exhaustive study of the subject.

## II

A work of art is something that is valued. Its objectively recordable or factually existing qualities do not in the abstract make it a work of art, but only the value which an interpreter ascribes to these qualities—combined with the feelings and ideas which they arouse—makes it for the valuating interpreter a work of art. It thus depends on the valuating interpreter if an aesthetic object (we limit the class to objects brought forth by the hand of man or adapted by him with a view to serve an aesthetic function) for him belongs to the category “works of art.”

The factual qualities of a work of art (disregarding changes through age, lighting, etc.) remain always the same, but the way in which they are identified, interpreted, and experienced, in other words, how they function for the interpreter, varies owing to different causes (e.g., psychological, sociological, culture-geographical, and historical), and this function in its turn (even if it happened to be intersubjectively fairly well-established) is subject to variable valuations. One could say that an aesthetic object is a potential work of art: the valuation of it being implied by an individual consideration through which at least some of its possibilities are realized.<sup>21</sup>

As a variant of Panofsky's synoptical table over different iconographic and icon-

ologic categories of interpretation<sup>22</sup> I perceive the components of a work of art<sup>23</sup> by means of the following roughly generalizing scheme:

### Scheme I.

- 1) Purely visual appearances (as shape—as distinguished from “form”<sup>24</sup>—color, texture).
- 2) a) Formal phenomena; illusory qualities (as plasticity, perspective, space); “perceptual forces.”<sup>25</sup>  
b) Representations (identified motifs).
- 3) Meanings.  
a) Thematic and/or symbolic references implied by 1 and 2.  
b) “Expressive qualities.”
- 4) The total referential function of the work of art, implied by the constituents of 1, 2, and 3 as potentially realized by an interpreter.

The first category may be said to be wholly objective. The second and third are to a certain degree dependent on the psychologic and intellectual qualifications of the interpreter, but none the less they may be regarded as relatively stable. The fourth, which thus is the defining formulation of the potential total-meaning as experienced by an interpreter, displays a somewhat extensive variation.

One may talk about the categories 1, 2, and 3 as the “material” for the defining formulation of the potential total-meaning (4). A work of art in addition to being constituted of different—according to current linguistic usage—formal elements, is also constituted of different meanings (and this is especially true of art before 1900). That which is the meaning of a form, for instance, in 2b, may, so to speak, be the material for a new meaning in 3, which in its turn may be the material for a referential component in the formulation of the total-meaning (which may be called the potential content of art). This designation *material-meaning* (component-meaning respectively/total-meaning/total-content/) seems to me better suited to avoid misunderstanding than the prevalent dichotomy *form-meaning*. For *form* in the general sense can as we know (for instance, in nonfigurative art) im-



mediately imply a meaning; on the other hand, a meaning (as that of a personification) may combine with one or more other meanings (as those of some attributes) to make up the material ("form") for a more defined or complex meaning (for instance, as the meaning or content of an allegory).

The whole body of the categories 1-4 may be subject to valuation, but generally a certain conception of art (different aesthetic expectations) would in a greater or less degree seem to be based on a special evaluation of one or some of these categories. To mention but a few extreme examples: One person may perhaps found his judgment of the aesthetic object mainly on the basis of 1 and 2a (decorative aspect); another on the basis of 2b (naturalistic aspect), a third on the basis of 3 (literary aspect). There are also imaginative people who are able to create a highly valued content of experience even on the basis of a rather undecided formulation through 1-3. But in this case the total-meaning, such as it is experienced by the interpreter's power of imagination, naturally varies considerably from one interpreter to another. A vague formulation of a potential total-meaning gives a wider scope to the interpreter's private imagination and power to self-dependent "second-hand-creating" than that which is the case with a work of art conditioned by a well-defined formulation of a potential total-meaning. Thus the vaguer the defining formulation through 1-2-3 of the potential total-meaning, so much greater is the inter-subjective variation of the experienced total-meaning.

The way in which the different components (within the categories 1-2-3) function (in order to effectuate the realization of the potential total-meaning) for different individuals, groups, epochs, and so on, ought to be an important study for aesthetics, all the more as this field is open to empirical investigations. In general, however, it seems as though most students were more interested in questions of the type, "In what manner ought one value the function of the work of art?" and several answers to this question have, as is well known, been given in the course

of time. Four main groups may generally be stated:

The work of art has been valued as

### *Scheme II.*

- 1) Expression of emotions.
  - a) The emotions of the originator.
  - b) Emotions as such.
- 2) Stimulus of emotions.
  - a) To duplicate the emotions of the originator.
  - b) To evoke emotions as such.
- 3) Symbolic organon.
  - a) To call forth certain more or less distinct ideas or conceptions.
  - b) A medium of knowledge or "insight."
  - c) As a "teleological" medium.<sup>26</sup>
- 4) Pleasure stimulus on hedonistic grounds.

These evaluations, of course, are usually based on combinations of the basic norms. The Romanticists however looked at art chiefly as a "symbolic organon," as a medium of transcendental "insight" (3b).

I will in future speak about *symbolic* or *referential* function in regard to all components of a work of art, which in some way or another refer to, or get the interpreter to take into account, phenomena which de facto are not present in the aesthetic object.<sup>27</sup> This referential function can be said to take place on different levels, of which the fundamentals are of three kinds:

### *Scheme III.*

- x) mimetic (2b in scheme I).
- y) formal (2a in scheme I).
- z) metaphorical (3 in scheme I).

To the first (x) I count every figuration, which is identified with a factual or fictive concrete object, which is thus represented (with a more or less degree of resemblance).<sup>27</sup> We ordinarily say that the figuration "represents" something; it constitutes a motif. Such primal motifs mimetically represent physical and/or psychological conditions and/or events (for instance, as an identified gesture, an action, or a relationship between the primal motifs). (y) The referential function of the formal components—which of course is not as explicit as the referential

function of the mimetic motifs—is implied in what Arnheim describes as “perceptual forces.” In this case, the formal components act “as if,” thus by analogy they refer to or call up certain ideas, which in themselves are not virtually present in the work of art, such as when a critic found in one of Malevitch’s suprematic constructions “a ‘labile’ Floating with a superposed, ‘threatening’ Weight.”<sup>28</sup> Here one might perhaps speak about an associate form-acting.

But in still another way the motif has a referential function (z). Let us say that an artist depicts a rose and thereby wants to designate the concept *love*. This case is what in art history is generally labeled with the terms *symbol*, *symbolic*. The symbolic meaning does not lie in the motif as such, but in the represented object. When a motif functions in this way I will call it an “object-symbol.” The object-symbol in its turn has as we know different manners of functioning. I am not going to deal with the important question, “In what ways does an object-symbol function?” in this study, but only suggest some relevant examples.

A motif may thus function symbolically

- A) According to conventional agreement (arbitrary or stipulated symbol).
- B) By analogy (analogy-symbol).
- C) Contiguity (contiguity-symbol).<sup>29</sup>

Since the content of the traditional, deliberate symbolic art is conditioned by a complex of symbolically functioning motifs, we may speak about the separate object-symbol as a *primal symbol*. *Primal symbol* is thus a term which is related to the syntactical study of relating different object-symbols. The meaning of the primal symbol often is ambiguous. Certainly the artist may have intended one special meaning, but he may also purposely have given the symbol ambiguity. Furthermore, the meaning of the symbol often varies in relation to different interpreters, different cultural environments and times, and naturally also in relation to its context. One may say that the symbol has a more or less circumscribed potentiality of meaning. The universe of potential meanings I call the symbol’s frame of reference.

As has already been suggested, the different primal symbols in art are usually combined—in order to limit the frame of reference and/or designate a more complex meaning. When two or more primal symbols are (apprehended as) organized into one whole, designating a common designatum or complex of designata, I will speak about a *composed symbol*.

It is on this level that we must take the current distinction between symbol and allegory into consideration, because *allegory* is in my opinion a term to characterize the way in which the referential constituents of the composed symbol cooperate and function (according to the originator’s intention and/or to the apprehension of the interpreter). The allegory can thus be said to be a kind of composed symbol.

The allegory in its turn often is a part of a greater symbolically functioning whole, but it would be pointless to speak about “primal allegory” as in a way corresponding to “primal symbol.” *Allegory* and *allegoric* consequently are terms which apply to a certain kind of symbolic constituents of a work of art, but under certain conditions they are applicable to describe the dominant mode of reference of the work of art as a whole.

It is at present a widespread opinion that art has a referential function; what one has in mind here is of course something quite different from allegoric functioning. In order to name this total symbolic function of the work of art, or what Langer has called the “art symbol,”<sup>30</sup> and after a revision, the “expressive form” of the work of art,<sup>31</sup> I want to propose the term *total*—or better, *integration-symbol*. The meaning of the integration-symbol is thus identical with the content of our experience of the work of art. The fundamental mistake with the Romantic—and most modern as well—investigations of the concepts *symbol* and *allegory* is, on the one hand, that these concepts are regarded and treated as antithetic, and, on the other, that they do not distinguish these different levels of symbolic (referential) functioning. We can further assert that when the Romantic theorists demanded that art should be symbolic and not allegoric,

they aimed implicitly at the total function of the work of art.

Let us for the sake of simplicity limit ourselves to this total referential function of the work of art. In this respect *symbol* and *allegory* as such are by no means antithetic concepts. Whether a work of art is to be characterized as symbolic (integration-symbolic) or allegoric depends on how it is apprehended or experienced; many times it may be merely a matter of stress. The distinction may be settled in two ways, by a historical or a critical approach: that is to say, in regard to the intention of the originator and/or his cultural environment or in regard to the apprehension of the scrutinizing interpreter.

In the definitions of the two concepts from Romanticism to the present, we find as a common denominator that allegory designates a combination of object-symbols whose meaning is grasped or interpreted discursively and intellectually, whereas the meaning of the integration-symbol (the work of art as a symbolic whole, "the art symbol" [Langer]) cannot be wholly described except in terms of the emotionally colored experience of the work of art. Although *allegory* may be a term to designate a symbolic constituent (a composed symbol) of the work of art as well as a characterization of the referential constituents of the work of art as a whole, I regard this term *allegory* as applicable within the third category (3a) of scheme I. For a work of art which by historical consideration is conceived as allegoric in the latter sense may nevertheless from a critical (subjective) point of view possibly call forth an experience which is not identical with the apprehension of the interpreted allegoric content of the work. The allegoric content serves in this case as constituting material for an individually realized total-meaning of that work. What I call *integration-symbol* (which thus designates the total referential function of the constituents of the work of art just as this totality defining formulates the individual content of experience as a potential realization of the meaning-references of the work of art) is, as has been already pointed out, applicable within the fourth category (scheme I).

The allegory gets its meaning through the constituting object-symbols in their definite relation to one another. This special relation of the object-symbols, constituting an allegory, I will call the *function-pattern* of the allegory. The function-pattern is characterized by a more or less definite *succession*, that is to say, the meaning of the allegory as a sequence of object-symbols in a certain relation is partly due to the succession in which the meanings of its constituents are combined and interpreted. The succession is usually indicated by mimetic-illustrative representations but also by formal and compositional factors ("perceptual forces"). The meaning of the allegory, which is formulated discursively and grasped intellectually, can be adequately transformed into words—indeed the fully grasping of it may be said to presuppose a kind of tacit verbalization. When the interpreter has been aware of its meaning, the allegory as medium is consumed. To the extent that the allegory calls forth an emotional response, this response is a product of the allegory's meaning. The feeling or quality of feeling never constitutes material for the total-meaning of the allegory. The allegory-functions in a way as a rebus; its total meaning is, so to speak, the logical sum of the meanings of its constituents to one another (i.e., the function-pattern) and by the succession of interpretations.

The integration-symbol is what qualifies the individual content of experience, caused by the work of art. As is seen, it is hardly possible to draw a distinct boundary between the integration-symbol as a property of the work of art and its meaning as experience of the interpreter, caused by the symbolic function of the work of art. Partly owing to the emotional qualities involved and the introspective way of awareness, this content experienced can hardly be verbally transformed in an adequate way, but only paraphrased. Whereas the purely formal factors have only indirect importance for the referential function of the allegory, viz., to the extent that they work upon the succession of interpretation of the constituting object-symbols, they play by virtue of the associative power of the "perceptual forces" a



very important role in regard to the functioning of the integration-symbol. One might perhaps—in accordance with a commonly accepted view—liken a work of art as a formulation of an aesthetically functioning “statement” to a “persuasive defi-

nition.” Its persuasive success should then be equivalent to the interpreter’s engagement in the work of art. It is also a widespread conception that what I have called *persuasive success* does not essentially depend on the meaning-references of the



Fig. 1. P. O. Runge *Die Lehrstunde der Nachtigall*, Kunsthalle, Hamburg.

work of art in itself (as, for instance, on a moral, religious, political, or philosophical theme or message), but on the way in which the constituting material defining formulates the individually realized total-meaning or content. Thematic indications and symbolic ingredients (allegories, personifications, etc.) limit the frame of reference of the work of art and constitute, together with pure visual qualities, that material which conditions the total-meaning as experienced by an interpreter. This formulation thus has a referential function which is realized by the very fact that an interpreter responds to the appeal of the work of art. The formulation is the integration-symbol, and the potential realization of its possible meaning-references is the meaning or content of the integration-symbol (identical with the content of experience of the interpreter, caused by the work of art). How this integration-symbolic function operates presents a very important problem to investigate.

## III

As examples I will discuss two works, *Lehrstunde der Nachtigall* and *Klosterfriedhof im Schnee*, painted by outstanding representatives of German romantic art, Philipp Otto Runge and Caspar David Friedrich.

In Runge's painting the subject is developed in a two-fold manner: the oval in the center, and the *trompe l'oeil* frame. The theme is indicated by the lyre-playing Amor (Love), who crowns the composition, and by the grasshopper (Christianity) in the lower edge of the picture. In the central field we find the artist's beloved through a conventional motif (viz., a pair of wings) transformed into Psyche (The Soul), in the process of teaching a nightingale (the love-singer, here personified as a winged *putto*) how to play. The lesson takes place without disturbing interference from the cupid (Earthly love), who sleeps (!) on a red (!) cushion. In the frame, the



Fig. 2. C. D. Friedrich, *Klosterfriedhof im Schnee*. Nationalgalerie, Berlin.

content is made precise: To the right the genius of the rose (earthly love-inclination) tries in vain to catch the nightingale (here a symbol of Love as idea), which, to the left, willingly has let himself be caught by the genius of lily (pure, heavenly love-inclination). The singing nightingale was also for the Romanticists a symbol of the love-poetry, and the *Lehrstunde* consequently becomes a kind of declaration of program for Romantic art and poetry: they shall celebrate not earthly love—as, for instance, Schlegel in his novel *Lucinde*—but heavenly love in the light of the Christian religion.

The picture is, as we see, filled with object-symbols with clearly fixed meanings, which are combined in a certain succession into composed symbols, functioning as allegories. One easily distinguishes three component-allegories, viz., the illustrative pattern of the three main motifs of the oval and the illustrative pair of allegories of the frame: lily-genius-nightingale, which are combined into a greater allegoric entirety with the Cupid and grasshopper (in a way an antithetic pair of primal symbols) as a thematically indicating keynote.

The theme of Friedrich's painting is indicated by a number of symbolic motifs. The parched branches on the ground, the lifeless trees, the forgotten graves with their fractured crosses, the ruin, the funeral procession, the winter snow, the twilight—everything speaks about death and decay. These symbolic ingredients are but a limitation of the symbolic frame of reference of the picture and their meaning is the material for a content on another level. Let us however look at the formal and compositional factors. The motifs are symmetrically arranged around the vertical central axis. The two halves are almost identical repetitions of one another and even in pictorial space this rigid symmetrical weight balances. The ogival entrance and the remainder of the high choir, illuminated by faint moonlight, are in the direct center. Here the essential action in both a literal and figurative sense is to take place. This correct symmetry brings about a contrastless and therefore lifeless balance. Everything in the picture

has an almost identical counterpart; the equilibrium becomes nerveless and static. The composition lacks that tension-filled, dynamic balance, which is the result of conflicting form factors keeping one another in check in their strife for the picture space. Such a balance appears stimulating and vital, but the one in Friedrich's picture seems petrified and dead; the whole pattern is motionless, the formal pulse ceased.

There is however an element which disturbs this equilibrium, which infuses a slight waft of life into this world of breathless tranquillity: the monks, who in procession walk on towards a last symbolic ceremony. The figures are placed in pairs and grouped into a curve towards the center. They are connected into a uniform group of gestalts, which through the mutual similarity of the figures and the regular variation of the motion-scheme produces an almost stroboscopic effect and indicates an obvious movement towards the center of the picture, the altar. The perspective diminution strengthens the effect of unity and collected movement towards the central point. This group, which both as to form and content represents the only living and animate element in the picture, implies through its motion tendency the contrastless symmetry and total harmony. For this form comprehended as a unit presses, to be sure, towards the central point of the composition, and when it, so to speak, has forfeited its inherent power of motion (thus the only motion which the picture possesses) and attained its goal, the vitality of the composition is wholly exhausted.

"The fated inexorability by which all living existence glides towards its ultimate limit" is indicated not only through the object-symbols but also through the pure formal components in their relation within the composition as an entirety. The object-symbols suggest the theme, but the persuasive success of the picture (viz., in this particular case with the author as interpreter) is to a great extent due to the associative form-acting.<sup>32</sup>

With regard to the total symbolic function of its constituents, I will call this



picture symbolic (as an integration-symbol). This special function as suggested above was, I believe, lacking in the painting by Runge, which for me had the character of an allegory.

Quite apart from what a work of art was supposed to express according to the Romanticists, we can reasonably regard their obscure talk about *symbol* as a recommendation of a purely visual symbolic function of the work of art as a whole. But the Romanticists seldom discussed a work of art in visual terms, only in intellectual, philosophical ones. The Romanticists posed the problem, but in their efforts to clarify it, they became enmeshed in a tangle of metaphysical speculation and abstruse phraseology. Yet in their groping endeavors to find a solution, they made a significant contribution to the shaping of the modern view, not only of symbol but of the general communicative function of art.

The ambiguous symbol-concept of the programmatic theories of Romanticism may from a general point of view be understood with the aid of the concept *integration-symbol* proposed here in order to give import to the distinction between symbol and allegory. Thereby one also avoids the empty, circular reasoning, which often obscures the discussions not only of the symbol-concept of Romanticism but also of the terms *symbol* and *allegory* in general.

<sup>1</sup> B. A. Sorenson, *Symbol und Symbolismus in den ästhetischen Theorien des 18. Jahrhunderts und der deutschen Romantik* (Copenhagen, 1963); J. G. Robertson, *Studies in the Genesis of Romantic theory in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge 1923).

<sup>2</sup> G. Berefelt, "The Regeneration Problem in German Neoclassicism and Romanticism," *JAAC*, XVIII, 4 (1960), 475 ff.

<sup>3</sup> See A. Nivelle, *Les Théories esthétiques en Allemagne. De Baumgarten à Kant* (Paris 1955), pp. 114 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Winckelmann, *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der Griechischen Werke in der Maleray und Bildhauerkunst* (Dresden and Leipzig, 1756) p. 40.

<sup>5</sup> Winckelmann, *Versuch einer Allegorie besonders für die Kunst*, (Leipzig, 1866), p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Winckelmann, *Versuch*, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Winckelmann, *Versuch*, p. 27.

<sup>8</sup> This becomes obvious when, as examples of symbols, they refer to Jupiter as "Bild höchster Würde unumschränkter Macht" and to other ancient deities.

<sup>9</sup> "Die Gemälde," *Athenaeum*, II: 1 (1799), 135 ff.

<sup>10</sup> See the dialogues "Über die Poesie" and "Über die Mythologie" in *Athenaeum*, III: 1 (1800), 58 ff. and 94 ff.

<sup>11</sup> "Blütenstaub," *Athenaeum*, I: 1 (1798), 70.

<sup>12</sup> Schelling, *System des transzendentalen Idealismus* (chap.: "Das Verhältnis der Philosophie der Kunst zu dem ganzen System der Philosophie") (1800).

<sup>13</sup> Note Schelling's definition of *beauty* (*System des transz. Idealismus*, chap.: "Charakter des Kunstprodukts"): "Das Unendliche endlich dargestellt ist Schönheit."

<sup>14</sup> It is significant that Goethe asks Schelling to explain to a young painter the difference between the "allegorischer und symbolischer Behandlung... weil sich um diese Axe so viel dreht" (29. XI 1803). *Goethe und die Romantik. Briefe mit Erläuterungen*, 1-2 (Weimar, 1898-99), i, 236.

<sup>15</sup> Winckelmann also preferred a category of "signs" which "contained" the designatum and not only "pointed to" it (see *Versuch einer Allegorie*, p. 17). It sometimes seems as though the principal difference between Winckelmann's allegory and the symbol of some Romanticists, for instance the Schlegel brothers, was, disregarding the different names, that the former wanted to see the "image" constituted by human figures taken from classical antiquity, whereas the latter wanted their "images" to consist of landscape-motifs or motifs from Christian (Catholic) mythology.

<sup>16</sup> Jutta Hecker, *Das Symbol der Blauen Blume im Zusammenhang mit der Symbolik der Romantik* (Jena, 1931), p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> For a more thorough treatment of Runge's theory, see G. Berefelt, "Beobachtungen zum Verhältnis Ph. O. Runge zu J. G. Herder," *Zeitschrift für Ostforschung*, IX, 1 (1960) 14 ff.; and Berefelt, "Bemerkungen zu Ph. O. Runge's Gestaltungstheorie," *Baltische Studien*, 48 (1961), 51 ff.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Schelling: Art functions parallel to nature.

<sup>19</sup> Runge, *Hinterlassene Schriften*, 1-2 (Hamburg, 1840-41), I, 72, 73, 77, 78, 81, 180 ff.

<sup>20</sup> E. Cassirer, *Wesen und Wirkung des Symbolbegriffs* (Darmstadt, 1956). Susanne Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* (1948); *Feeling and Form* (1953); *Problems of Art* (1957)—(G. Berefelt, "Den objectiverade känslan." En kommentar till Susanne Langers poesiteori, *Nya Argus*, No. 17 (Helsingfors, 1958), pp. 257 ff.)

<sup>21</sup> Cf. S. Pepper, *The Basis of Criticism in the Arts* (Cambridge, Mass., 1949), pp. 142 ff.

<sup>22</sup> E. Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York, 1939); Introduction.

<sup>23</sup> "Works of art" refers in this study only to those which are two-dimensional, i.e., paintings, drawings, and the like.

<sup>24</sup> See R. Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1954), p. 65.

<sup>25</sup> Arnheim, pp. 5 ff.

<sup>28</sup> See for instance, I. Jenkins, *Art and the Human Enterprise* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958).

<sup>27</sup> I here adopt a trivial and broad sense of the term *symbol* based on ordinary dictionary definitions, as for instance: A symbol is "that which stands for or suggests something else by relationship, association, convention, or accidental but not intentional resemblance (Webster's *New International Dictionary*). But in accordance with Munro I see no necessity for excluding "intentional resemblance" as in mimetic symbolism. See T. Munro, "Suggestion and Symbolism in the Arts," *JAAC*, XV, 2 (1956), 158; C. W. Morris, "Foundations of the Theory of Signs," *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science*, I, 2 (Chicago, 1953).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Arnheim's analysis of Giotto's *Lamentation of Christ* in *Art and Visual Perception*, pp. 365 ff., which even formally acts the theme "death and resurrection," or Vogt's description of the "as-if-analogies" in Grünewald's Isenheimer Altar, M. Vogt, *Grünewald. Meister gegenklassischer Malerei* (Zürich, 1957).

<sup>29</sup> Munro, "Suggestion and Symbolism," pp. 164 ff.

<sup>30</sup> *Feeling and Form*.

<sup>31</sup> *Problems of Art*, pp. 124 ff.

<sup>32</sup> In conscious opposition to the traditional allegoric "constructions," Friedrich once wrote that "ein Bild muss nicht erfunden, sondern empfunden sein." C. D. Friedrich, *Bekenntnisse* (Leipzig, 1924), p. 122.